No. 248

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

28th November, 1945

DEAR MEMBER,

The frank words in which Mr. Molotov and Mr. Bevin have recently expressed their Governments' feelings underline the difficulty, as the atomic bomb has underlined the necessity, of Russian-British-American co-operation to preserve the peace of the world and ensure the continuance of civilized humanity.

RUSSIA AND THE WEST

There are sharp disagreements on matters of policy arising out of the inevitably difficult problems left by a long, bitter and most destructive war. There are grave questionings in our minds about some of the methods used by the Russians, particularly in the Baltic states where the N.K.V.D. has been ruthlessly active. From other parts there come stories of Red Army supplies being released for civilians, local situations restored to order, and the disciplined withdrawal of Red Army troops. Our knowledge of what is happening is so slender that unless we are on our guard we tend to exercise an unconscious selection of facts on which we base moral judgments. Much has been said in condemnation of Russian methods, but comparatively little of the lively business being done in the black markets of Europe by British and American troops, and still less about more serious contraventions of the moral code.

Similarly, on matters of policy we are disposed to be less or more suspicious of Russian motives according as our general outlook is pro- or anti-Russian. Political opinion in this country is far more nervous of Russian intentions in eastern Europe than of American intentions in Japan.

If we fall into a state of mind in which we are always more ready to think indulgently of one Great Power than of another; if into the use of the term "Anglo-Saxon" there creeps the unspoken meaning "anti-Russian," then indeed we have opened Pandora's box and must brace ourselves for the worst. To check these tendencies one of the chief needs is that we should prevent ideas about Russia from forming clots in our minds which prevent the circulation of other ideas and impressions. It may be necessary for us to say that certain of the methods used by the Russian Government in Europe are an offence against humanity; this we can only do if we are also demonstrating our alternative to

Russian methods. We have to go on holding in our minds opposite and conflicting ideas and impressions, trying as far as we can to come to know and understand *Russia herself*. This News-Letter is not, therefore, an attempt to reach final conclusions, but a summary of certain illuminating material and a temporary stocktaking.

"THE REAL SOVIET RUSSIA"

A book with this title, by David J. Dallin, has recently been published by the Yale University Press, and is not yet available in this country. It creates the impression of being the work of a serious investigator. It is important with all writers on the U.S.S.R. to understand what is their background and point of view. Mr. Dallin was a Russian Communist. His point of view is strongly anti-Stalinist. Here, without editorial comment, is a summary of the main contents of his book :—

Writing before the end of the war, Mr. Dallin utters a strong warning against the view current in wide circles that Russia has ended its revolution and reverted to being essentially a national State engaged in restoring many of the elements of its traditional past. There was, during the war, a powerful nationalist revival, the signs of which are apparent in many directions. There were obvious psychological reasons for this and the tendency was fostered by the Government as a means of strengthening resistance to the enemy. But the essential thing to understand is that both the national revival and the new friendliness to religion have always been subordinated to the maintenance and strengthening of the Communist revolution.

Mr. Dallin then proceeds to describe Soviet society as it was at the beginning of the war. There were, he says, broadly speaking, four classes. The highest class was that of state employees, numbering ten or eleven millions.

Secondly, there were the workers, urban and rural, comprising eighteen to twenty millions, of whom about eight millions were industrial workers.

Next came the peasants, totalling about forty millions.

Finally, there was the large class of forced labour that may be estimated as comprising from seven to twelve millions.

The first class of state employees is made up of those who run the government, carry on the administration, control economic activity, direct the army, promote education, science and the arts, conduct the press and look after the national health. It is to all intents and purposes identical with the intelligentsia. It is the highest class because there is no landed aristocracy nor any financial or industrial magnates above it.

Of this upper class of state employees about 15 per cent belong to the Communist party. Between the general outlook of the

class as a whole and that of the party there is a marked divergence. The party has always been suspicious of the intelligentsia and has from time to time had recourse to drastic purges. There is, however, between the two a continuous exchange of ideas and reciprocal influence. In general the desire of the intelligentsia is for greater security. They would prefer a government based on law to a police state. They want freedom from arbitrary arrest, purges and loss of rank. They are not opposed to the control of economic activity by the state, but with them this control is an established fact rather than, as in the case of the party, a matter of principle. Their attitude to religion is much less hostile than that of the party.

The new Soviet intelligentsia will be the decisive factor in all future social changes. Its training and experience make it the one social force capable of initiative and vigorous action. It is the dominant force in the social life of the country, though not in its political leadership. It is the reservoir from which all new movements must draw their resources.

The second of the four main classes, that of the workers, is a social class that is almost entirely new. The working class, which existed at the beginning of the first world war, has in various ways almost entirely disappeared. The present class of workers is made up almost wholly of peasants, bringing to the cities the habits and memories of the villages. The great majority of the workers take no interest whatever in the party. But the top layer of the more active and ambitious derive marked advantages from membership of the party and bring it valuable reinforcement.

The third class of the peasantry, nearly all collectivised, constitutes half of the total working population. Though there is a growing differentiation, accentuated by the war, between the poor and the well-to-do, the general lot of the peasants bears many resemblances to the old order, with the state as master in place of private landlords. The peasantry remains without any independent political or other organizations. It has not the strength nor the experience nor the unity for any political initiative, but the interests of this vast mass of the population are bound to assert themselves in times of political crisis.

Fourthly, a notable feature of the Soviet economy is the use on a vast scale of forced labour in concentration camps. An exact estimate of the number involved cannot be given, but it is not less, and is probably greater, than the total number of free industrial workers in Russia. The matter is shrouded in secrecy. Those condemned to forced labour include criminals, kulaks, political opponents of the régime and national groups exiled as a preventive measure.

During the war this immense reservoir of manpower was drawn on to erect new buildings for evacuated plants, to undertake large

works of construction at the ports and to build railways in various parts of the country. Without those vast armies of forced labour the state could not have attained the effective position it had reached at the beginning of the war nor could the needs of the military forces have been supplied.

The directing force of the whole of Soviet society is the Communist party, which has at present a membership of five millions with seventeen million adherents of the Communist Youth League. But the effective element in the party does not comprise more than a few thousand members. The Communist conception of a party resembles the officer corps which organizes an army.

The foundation of the government's power is its police force, known formerly as O.G.P.U., now the N.K.V.D. Only the complete solidarity of the high party leadership and the N.K.V.D. makes the existence of the Soviet state possible. The N.K.V.D. acts as a check on the army, purges it when necessary, and arrests army leaders who are politically suspect. The N.K.V.D. constitutes a real army with its own officers, artillery and aviation. It was estimated before the war to number a quarter of a million.

Every member of the Communist party is obliged to keep the N.K.V.D. informed of all that he hears or sees that may be of interest to it. In addition to this general obligation on all party members there are thousands of special informers whose job it is to gather information on all aspects of social life. Many thousands of non-partisans perform the same function. They are persons who at one time or another came under suspicion and have been left at liberty on condition that they serve as regular informers. The presence of informers in every non-political group, every entertainment and in every house committee is accepted as a matter of course.

IS THIS THE REAL RUSSIA?

Mr. Dallin's book is full of statistics and of careful analyses. It makes grim reading. We have asked several people who know Russia at first hand and have made a study of Russian affairs, to comment on Mr. Dallin's approach.

One writer questions whether Mr. Dallin's description of forced labour is at all accurate, on the ground that figures are impossibly difficult to check and that when forced labour is discussed, forced or semi-forced migration, which is a common feature of the U.S.S.R., has to be kept in mind. Another thinks that reprisals against Ukrainian collaborationists may have increased the number. All agree that we just do not know or understand the facts.

Another commentator who has lived in Russia for some time, with exceptional opportunities for observation, thinks Mr. Dallin's picture is damagingly out of perspective.

" I've often tried to analyse what it is that attracts me about Russia, though without much success. It's a common phenomenon among those who have spent some time there. In part I think it is the feeling of tremendous vitality that seems to surround one. In part it is the staggering contradictions with which one is met in everything that happens. And there is the fascinating merging of the main stream of Russian history with the Communist philosophy imported from the west, and all the heart-searchings that go on in consequence. This merging is still so new that changes happen with bewildering rapidity, and one gets absorbed in watching the process. But most of all one is fascinated by the Russian people, in spite of the artificial barriers that are put in the way of meeting them. They are simple people, friendly, generous, kind, inquisitive, helpful, humorous and, in the main, quite unspoiled. They have a fatalistic acceptance of things which it is outside their power to control, and, at the same time, a profound belief that collectively they have the power to control everything. They are not much interested in worldly goods and very contemptuous of the sordid materialism and commercialism of the bourgeois world. The result is a freshness which has a strong appeal.

" The other side of the picture is a bureaucracy run riot. The Russians know that their bureaucracy is slow, cumbersome, inefficient, lacking in initiative or power to take decisions, and they curse it as heartily as any foreigner. But it is one of the prices that has to be paid for trying to do things in a hurry. Red tape accumulates when the human material comprising the machine is not good enough to do things properly according to the light of nature. Hence, for generations the Russian official has been taught that his paramount duty is to obey the rules. With any other form of administration the vast, sprawling, backward Russian empire would have fallen to pieces long ago. In other words, the nature of *any* Russian administration is dictated, not by the whims of a few dozen or a few thousand people, but by the job which it has to do and the quality of the human material through which it has to work. It's this whole complex of problems, coupled with my great affection for ordinary Russians, that attracts me so much.

" I don't know what Dallin's sources are, and he may be able to substantiate what he says. But I recognize a certain amount of it as venerable old skeletons. He seems to me to make no attempt to understand why some of the things happen to which he objects. There *is* much that is cruel in Russia, but so there is in India and other parts of the British Empire ; so there is in America, where workers' strikes were until recently put down by violence and where the negroes have few democratic rights ; so there is in Spain and Latin America ; and in Greece. And in Java we seem to be in a fair way to being committed to re-imposing an alien rule.

" All these things are wrong—as wrong as anything that is happening in Russia, and for many of them we ourselves are responsible. We do what we can to put them right aud protest against them from time to time. But first we try to see why they have happened and how we can best help. That's an approach that is all too often lacking when we try to do something about Russia. There are happening things that are wrong and which cannot be excused and which call for some kind of moral protest. But if that is to be done, it demands the most tremendous humility and a very high degree of knowledge. There is some truth, of course, in what Dallin says, but it is very much only one side of the story and one cannot afford to ignore the other. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In the last war, the Russians collapsed ignominiously and by the end of it their Government was universally hated throughout the country. In this war they stood up in spite of the most appalling suffering to a far stronger and more dangerous German attack, and the Government emerged with its prestige and reputation greatly strengthened. Why ? If Dallin's account is anything near the truth the whole thing is quite inexplicable.

" The primary job of any government is to govern within the moral and historical framework within which it finds itself. It's no use our wishing it was a British or western European framework that the Russians are faced with ; and any judgments based on that premiss are irrelevant. What needs far more study is what is the Russian framework, and I do not see how it is possible to pass moral judgments on the actions of groups of people, as distinct from the actions of individuals, except against that background. Indeed, I think it is both dangerous and misleading to do so."

" THE PERSON AND COMMUNITY IN RUSSIAN CONSCIOUSNESS "

A paper by Professor Nicolas Berdyaev with this title, appears as the first issue of *Cahiers de la Nouvelle Époque*, a serial publication started by a group in Paris for the discussion of the problems of the new world, and, in particular, of the relations between Russia and the West. Professor Berdyaev is not, of course, writing as an observer ; the value of his paper is that here is a profound and sensitive mind reflecting upon the experience of the Russian people.

The following is a summary of his article, which is not so far available in this country.

It has become almost a *cliché* in wide circles in the West that in Russia the fully developed human person hardly exists. The truth is almost the exact opposite. The truth is that among the Russians the spirit of community is probably stronger than anywhere in the world. This is something quite different from socialization. The

spirit of community is not only innate in the Russian people, but has been fostered by their education by Christian Orthodoxy. It is shown in the open welcome and hospitality of Russian homes, in the need of communication which Russians feel, in their aversion to the conventional and formal aspects of social life, in the compassion and spirit of sacrifice which are characteristic of them.

The peoples of the West are so individualistic that they have difficulty in understanding what the spirit of community means. They identify it with the absence of personal consciousness. This is a profound error. The spirit of community presupposes a personality that is capable of transcending its own limitations. The person has always had a more pronounced expression in Russia than in the depersonalized and mechanized countries of the West, where persons tend to lose their distinctiveness in a common uniformity.

Nowhere has the problem of the person—of his destiny and of his conflict with the world and with history—been posed in a more acute form than in the Russian thought and literature of the nineteenth century. The exceptional humanity of Russian writings in this period is striking. They are penetrated by a profound pity for man, a moving compassion for the common people, for every suffering creature that appeals for help. The universal humanity of Pushkin is astonishing, and the cult of Pushkin since the revolution is highly significant.

Russia, moreover, has always been powerfully attracted to Christian universalism. Some of these ideas have played a larger part in the Revolution than is generally understood. The Marxist symbolism adopted by the Revolution is largely conventional and conceals ideas that are specifically Russian.

The Russian Revolution has been cruel, as was the French. In its inception humanitarian motives played a large part. But we can observe the fatal dialectic of life by which humanity can give place to inhumanity. Revolutions are in their nature unpropitious to the growth of the person and to liberty. They are movements of the masses, social changes having an almost geological character. This is a characteristic of all mass movements and not peculiar to Russia. When the first stages of socialist construction centred on the material aspects of life have been passed we may look for a renewal of spiritual principles and values.

It is beyond question that the humanity reflected in the whole of Russian literature remains the characteristic quality of the Russian soul. It is manifesting itself afresh in the new Soviet literature and in recent humanitarian tendencies in the U.S.S.R. The educational ideas of Tolstoy are exercising to-day a profound influence.

The rôle of Soviet Russia is before everything else bound up with the social transformation of the world. For the first time in

world history a great country has adopted as the fundamental principle of its life the refusal to accept the exploitation of man by man. One cannot understand the contradictions of Soviet Russia without viewing the facts in historical perspective. In Russia industrialization has taken place under communism. In England it took place under individualistic capitalism. Capitalist industry made its entry into the world with pitiless cruelty towards man. The industrialization of Russia has undoubtedly had its negative side, but it has saved not only Russia but all Europe from the slavery which Germany would have imposed. The dominating fact of which we must never lose sight is that technical civilization is in itself a depersonalizing force of the first order. Dehumanization is as real a danger in western Europe or in America as in Soviet Russia. The latter has its own contribution to make to the solution of a problem common to us all. The thirst for social justice is inherent in the Russian mentality.

When the problem is seen in its real depth, it becomes evident that only a Christian renaissance, which unites the truth of the person with the truth of the spirit of community, can assure victory over the dehumanization which threatens the whole world.

TRADE UNION DELEGATION TO RUSSIA

In July and August this year seven representatives of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation visited Russia at the invitation of the corresponding Russian trade union. This is the first visit of a British to a Russian trade union. They went out with the limited objective of seeing for themselves the half a dozen chief centres of the iron and steel industry and their report is chiefly a description in technical terms of the equipment, methods and conditions of work in these vast Russian steel plants.

The importance of their report is that they were looking at a phase of Russian life on which their experience enabled them to make judgments and comparisons. For this reason, and because, as they declare, they were not trying to prove anything, but merely to look, their report does give a picture of real people at work. They remark on the anxiety of the Russians that the British delegates should be pleased, so that the press constantly overwrote their comments. " If we said output was good, it became ' colossal ' ; if we said we were impressed, the press informed the people that we were ' amazed.' " They were plied with questions about Great Britain which showed how little Russian workers know of the outside world and how successfully they have been taught that their own very meagre standard of living was far above that in every other country. They found the men in charge of plants young and capable, and easy-going and informal in their relations with those under them, and the workers exhibiting " a certain casualness which

suggested that if they were not quite enjoying the work they were quite content in what they were doing and doing it in most cases efficiently." They were struck by the excellence of the best equipment, by the great attention given to physical conditions of work and to the health of workers, by the skill of many workers, by the high proportion of women and their employment on very heavy work, by the great enthusiasm for engineering. They were horrified by the casual treatment of machinery, by the lack of outlet for high earnings except in the state-run black market, and by the lack of any free association able to protect the workers from the state.

In all our thinking about Russia to-day, the striking figures of war damage given by Mr. Molotov in his speech on November 6th, need to be in the front of our minds. The Trade Union delegation's description of the destruction by the Germans of the great steel works at Zaporozhe in the Dneiper bend brings home the loss.

This first-class steel works took five years to build and was completed in 1934. Before the war it employed 17,000 people and had a vast output. No tide of battle could have destroyed so completely and utterly so vast a plant. It was the work of German experts who knew where to put every ounce of dynamite to do the maximum damage. "In our view," they said, "it will take as long, if not longer, to restore it as it did to build it in the first place."

OUR RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Here then are a number of supplementary and in some respects conflicting views of Russia. What bearing do they have on our attitude to Russian policy?

First, Russia is a country rising from terrible poverty, beaten back by the destruction wrought by a ruthless enemy, struggling to repair her terrible losses.

Secondly, in judging Russian policy the fullest allowance has to be made for the fact of revolution. The Soviet Government has been put in power by a recent revolution. Its authority is not derived from the orderly processes of democratic consent that among us are the slow growth of centuries.

Thirdly, whatever we may wish to be otherwise in Russia, the indispensable condition of its ever being realized is that peace should be maintained. If war were to occur, every other question would go by the board. Nothing should be left undone to convince the present rulers of Russia of the readiness of the western democracies to go all lengths with them in co-operation for the establishment of peace, without demanding from them the sacrifice of what they regard as vital.

Fourthly, this need not, and must not, preclude an open and fearless assertion of what we believe to be the true foundations of the new world order. Frankness is not a bar, but rather an aid, to

right relations, whether between individuals or between peoples. There is no basis on which human relations can be securely established except right and truth. We need not conceal our conviction that forced labour and the inhumanities which accompany it, the use of torture, methods of terrorism and the excesses of a secret police in whatsoever country they may exist are incompatible with civilization and Christianity. To keep silence about these matters, or to palliate them, is a betrayal of human rights.

Fifthly, we need to cultivate in ourselves integrity of purpose and impartiality of judgment. The element of power politics in Anglo-American policy needs to be frankly recognized. What appear to one side essential measures of defence are apt to look like a threat of aggression to the other. While there are fears in America and Great Britain of Russian expansion and aggression, Russia also, which has for centuries been the victim of aggression by western Powers—experiences which have sunk deep into the national memory—is anxiously concerned about her own security. From the Russian point of view it may well appear that America and Britain, while insisting on exclusive spheres of influence where their own security seems to be at stake, demand the right to take a hand in the politics of countries in which their interests are relatively small while those of Russia are vital.

An imaginative, resolute and patient effort to understand and to remove the causes of fear and to co-operate actively in the constructive tasks of peace may seem to be beyond the capacity of a weary, under-nourished, tortured, disillusioned and dissolving world. Yet the force needed to overcome its lethargy and inertia may be supplied in part by the knowledge that such an effort is indispensable for the survival of mankind.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

P.S. Many readers have expressed their interest in the last number of the News-Letter. The Bishop of Chichester writes that as two sons and two sons-in-law of Dr. Bonhoeffer were put to death by the Gestapo, he is opening a fund for relatives at The Palace, Chichester.

Subscriptions—12s. 6d. ($3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies 6d.; reduction for quantities.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20 BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W. 1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.

Christmas, 1945

In the past our members have welcomed the opportunity of sending a subscription to THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER as a Christmas gift to their friends.

If you wish to send a subscription to one or more of your friends, please complete and sign the order form on the back of this page and return it with the personal greetings slip, which we shall be glad to enclose with the first issue of the gift subscription.

Orders should reach this office not later than **December 14th,** as gift subscriptions, unless you send other instructions, will begin with the issue of December 26th, 1945, which will be dispatched before Christmas.

HOLBROOK LIBRARY
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

To the Christian News-Letter, 20 Balcombe Street, London, N.W. 1.

Please send THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER to :—

1. Name .....

   Address .....

   for 12 months at 12/6 ; 6 months at 6/6.

2. Name .....

   Address .....

   for 12 months at 12/6 ; 6 months at 6/6.

3. Name .....

   Address .....

   for 12 months at 12/6 ; 6 months at 6/6.

For which I enclose £ : s. d.

Donor's Name.....

Address .....

(*Personal greetings slips below*)

1.

Christmas Greetings

from..... *to*.....

A ..... months' subscription to

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

beginning with the enclosed fortnightly issue.

2.

Christmas Greetings

from..... *to*.....

A ..... months' subscription to

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

beginning with the enclosed fortnightly issue.

3.

Christmas Greetings

from..... *to*.....

A ..... months' subscription to

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

beginning with the enclosed fortnightly issue.